CHERÁN: A SIERRA TARASCAN VILLAGE—BEALS

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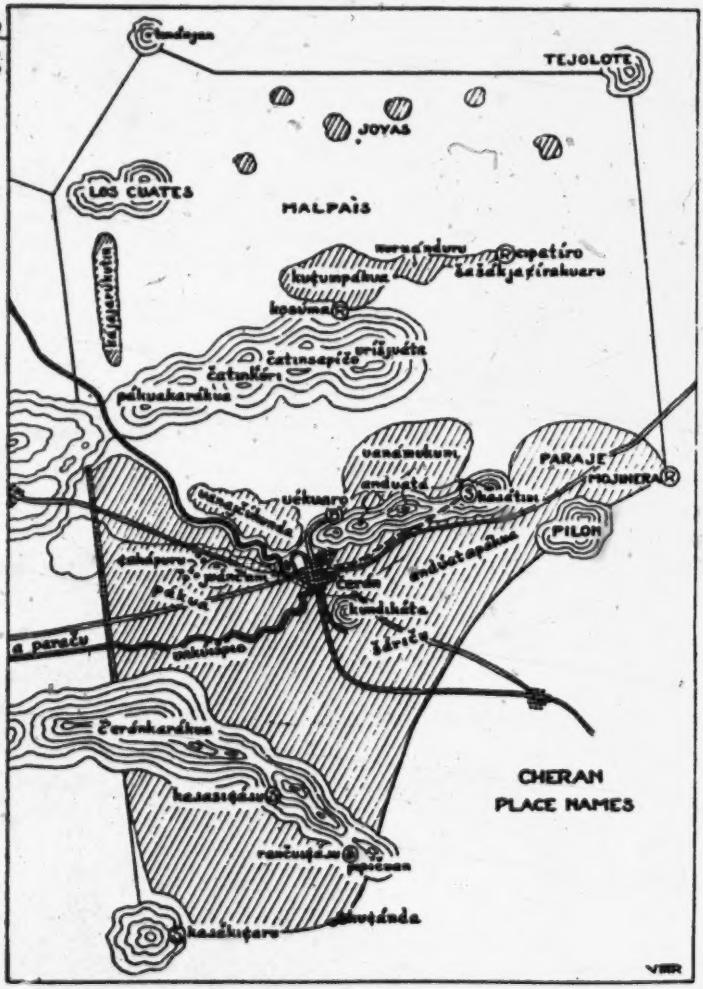

MAP 1.—The municipio of Cherán, showing the more important place names. See map 2 for explanation of symbols.

[p. 9]

1:Beals E-5 (1940-1941)1946 NU34 Tarasco NU34
[p.926] Sierra Tarascans

963 sions of the town. This feature will be discussed later.

633 A larger subdivision than the block is
103 furnished by the *barrio* as indicated in maps 4 and 5. These divisions function in relation to elections, office holding, and certain municipal and ceremonial obligations. *Barrio* No. I is to the northwest and is known as Jalúkutin, or in Hispanicized form Urúkutin. This name is said to mean "something on edge" or "something in a small corner," apparently referring either to its position on the edge of the largest *barranca* or its position against the small hill on the northeast edge of town. *Barrio* No. II is called "Keíku," "down," or the lower *barrio* (*barrio de abajo*), and is the southwest *barrio*. The southeast *barrio*, No. III, is "Kalákua," "up," the upper *barrio* (*barrio de arriba*). *Barrios* II and III are usually known by their Spanish terms, and not everyone knows the Tarascan names. The fourth *barrio* is Paricutin. This means "to pass to the other side" and refers to the position of the *barrio* on the other side of a *barranca*.

633 The *barrios* show very few differences.
184 Paricutin is less populated, has larger lots, and is said formerly to have been more isolated and backward, with fewer people speaking Spanish. The staff of the investigation all had the impression that this is still true to some extent, although little concrete evidence could be secured. Certainly, as the staff can well attest,
[231] the dogs of Paricutin are far less socialized than those of the remainder of the town.

633 Membership in the *barrio* is based entirely on residence. Property owners who reside in another *barrio* have *barrio* obligations only in the place of residence. There is no rivalry between *barrios* nor any instances in which *barrios* act as units on their own initiative. All the functions of the *barrio* appear to be derived from the *municipio*. There is no evidence whatever that the *barrio* has anything to do with regulating marriage or other social relationships. Even *barrio* chapels are lacking. In all probability the subdivisions are of Spanish origin and the only reason for suspecting otherwise lies in the mention of *barrios* by early Spanish writers in nearby areas.[27]

[27] On the other hand, as Silvio Zavala has shown fairly convincingly, Bishop Quiroga, first bishop of Michoacán and great

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INTRODUCTION

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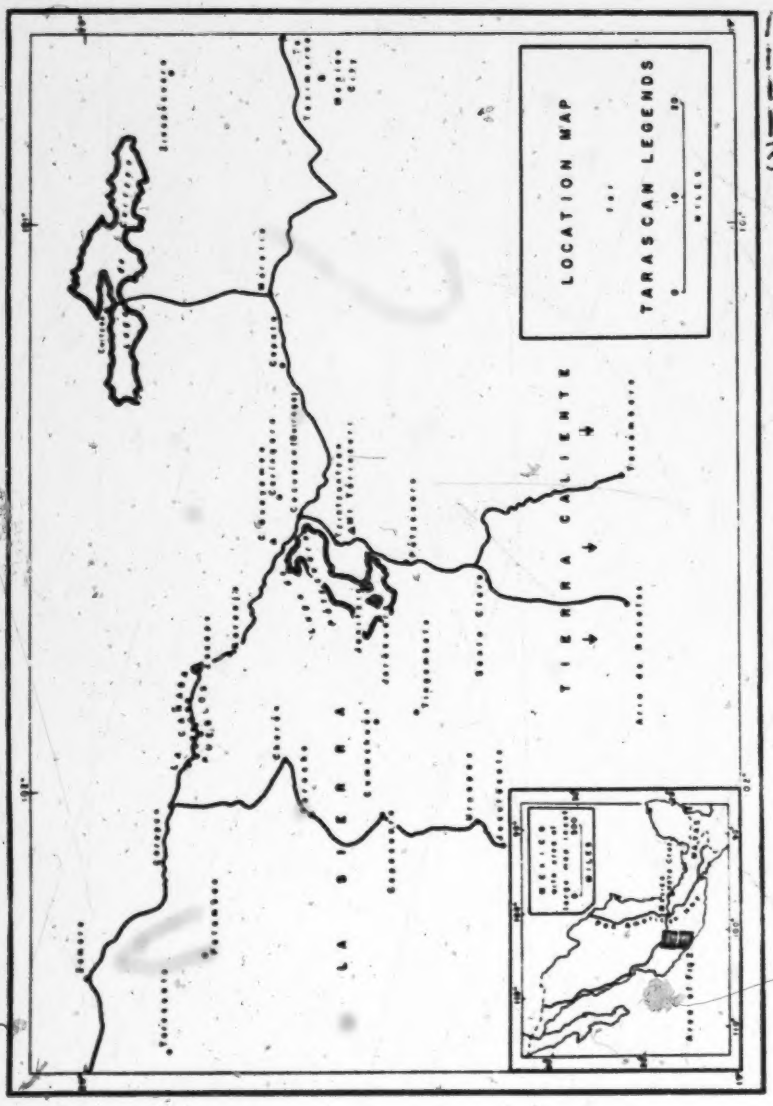

Fig. 1. Map of the Tarascan Area.

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of the town of Cuitzeo; the other stories were told by Manuel Valenzuela, a former guide around Tzintzuntzan, in his uniquely exciting, urbane style.

Told and retold for generations in their native tongue, these tales were rendered orally in the Spanish of the region and translated into English by the author.

The stories have a continuity dating back to the sixteenth century (Ruiz, 1940). The exact phraseology varies with the individual

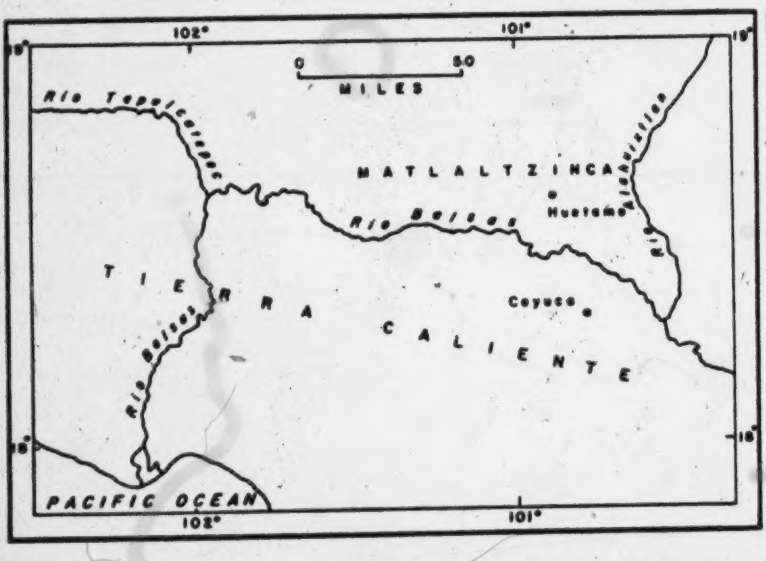

Fig. 2. Map of the Tierra Caliente of Michoacán

narrator, and his rendition usually conforms to the peculiar orientation given by his native pueblo. Some of these legends were published in Spanish by Ruiz in 1940, but this presentation represents their first appearance in English. The Ruiz versions are more elaborate than those presented herein and thereby form an interesting comparison.

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her and perform a special dance. The circle, the reverential respect, and the dance are repeated until the participants grow weary.

The Dance of the Viejitos is performed chiefly during the religious fiestas of December, especially in the town of Pátzcuaro, a short distance from the old imperial village of Tzintzuntzan (Fig. 1).

JUST AS THE BIRDS

Historical Comment

With their capital at Tzintzuntzan (Place of the Hummingbird), the vast Tarascan empire extended beyond the boundaries of the modern state of Michoacán and, next to the Aztec empire, was the largest political unit in Mexico. In spite of several accounts by early Spanish friars (Basalenque, 1886; Beaumont, 1932; Escobar, 1924; Mendieta, 1870; Rea, 1882), perhaps less is known about the origin and historical antecedents of the Tarascans than of any other major Mexican group.

Traditional Mexican hypotheses derive them from the northwest, suggesting close affinity to Nahuatl peoples. Philologically, this theory does not hold up; the Tarascan language has no family connection with other Mexican idioms and must be classified as an independent, isolated family (Mason, 1940). Recent archaeological work (Brand, 1944, Goggin, 1943, p. 57; Osborne, 1943) indicates a more southeasterly origin, possibly from the Mixteca of Oaxaca and Guerrero either down the east arm of the Balsas River valley or along the Pacific Coast and thence northward up the Balsas, Tepalcatepec, and Marqués rivers into central Michoacán (Fig. 2).

The Tarascans have never indulged in scholarly hypotheses. For them the answer to their early origins and travels unfolds in the legend of the birds. This legend supports the theory of a southern origin.

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THE LEGEND OF LAKE CUITZEO

Historical Comment

539 On the main highway leading northwest from Mexico City to
131 Guadalajara, an arterial road leads off to the north at Morelia and
103 passes by Lake Cuitzeo and the pueblo of the same name (Fig. 1).
133 Like all Mexican lakes, Cuitzeo is annually shrinking in size.
823 Nevertheless, the inhabitants of the tiny pueblo will gladly tell you the story of their once-proud lake which formerly resembled a heart.

539 This story belongs to a period of instability and planned war-
175 fare between the late twelfth and early fourteenth centuries. Spies
648 were sent into the lands of the snake-Chichimecs, located east of
721 Lake Pátzcuaro at Curínguaro, to learn the paths, river crossings,
and other data essential to a successful compaign.
726 Warriors went to battle with wreaths of flowers and plumes of eagle feathers on their heads. The lord in command would set out with a war party made up of columns of warriors. This traditional method of journeying to battle appears in the Cuitzeo legend.

The Legend

539 Under the protective rays of the Southern Cross, those divine
823 guiding stars, Cueróhperi created a garden. The goddess created crystalline rivers in the countryside of Guayangareo and placed the faithful Mount Manuma as the guardian over the region.

In this garden the princess Hapunda lived as a recluse by order of her father. Each morning Father Huriata's first rays of light gently awakened her with a kiss on the forehead. She was so lovely that her subjects called her "Tzinziquin." Always sad and melancholy, her tears flowed as profusely as the waters of the springs forming the rushing river which fell over the nearby cliffs and crashed against the rocks blocking the pathway into the lower valley. The relentless waters penetrated the rock, but the tears of Hapunda did not move the hearts of the gods, and she vainly

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[End Plate 2]

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Plate II. Tarascan Houses and Mode of Travel

[96] *Upper*, Tarascan homes, wooden fences are a recent innovation.
[103] *Lower*, Tarascans returning to mountains after selling firewood in
[438] Morelia.